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Understanding responses to risk: Can Identity Process Theory help?

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Overview

- Challenges of understanding responses to risk
- Using the lens of Identity Process Theory and Social Representations Theory
- Managing the risks of a nut allergy



15p OFF TOMORROW'S DAILY EXPRESS
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DAILY EXPRESS

Boyzone star Ronan Keating splits from wife after 12 years



Shares hit in panic over euro

STATINS CAN BE RISK TO HEALTH

But drug is still a life saver



HEART drugs used by millions of patients can cause cataracts, liver damage and kidney failure, according to new research.
Doctors have been taught to prescribe statins to lower cholesterol and prevent heart disease, but the new study suggests that long-term use of the drugs could lead to serious side effects.

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DAILY EXPRESS

CAROL VORDERMAN
My secret fight against booze



Yacht race Britons taken prisoner by Iranian gunboat

FREE £5 SPEND FOR EVERY READER AT WHOLESALE

POISON EGGS ALERT

Cheap imports from Spain treble cases of salmonella in Britain



RAIN, FOAM AND NOW SNOW IS ON THE WAY

JULY 28, 2003 www.timeeurope.com AOL Keyword: TIME

BUSH UNDER FIRE OVER IRAQ • Q&A WITH BERLUSCONI

TIME

SLISIE, I'M SO WORRIED... IS THIS CELL PHONE FRYING MY BRAIN? IS G.M. FOOD WARPING MY DNA? IS MY BODY A TOXIC-WASTE DUMP?

TOXIC DETERGENT
G.M. TOMATO SOUP
G.M. BROCCOLI SOUP

LIVING WITH RISK

How to sort the hard science from the empty scares—and keep your sanity

Daily Mail



SHE MAY HAVE A NEW LOVE, BUT INGRID TARRANT CONFESSES:
Why I (and I suspect many other women) regret divorcing

Medical Chief: 65,000 could die, one in three could be infected and retired GPs are being recruited to fight pandemic



SWINE FLU: IT'S GETTING SERIOUS

Ingrid Tarrant in two-mile police chase

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Judge frees thugs after just one day

HIDDEN SALT KILLING 40,000 A YEAR

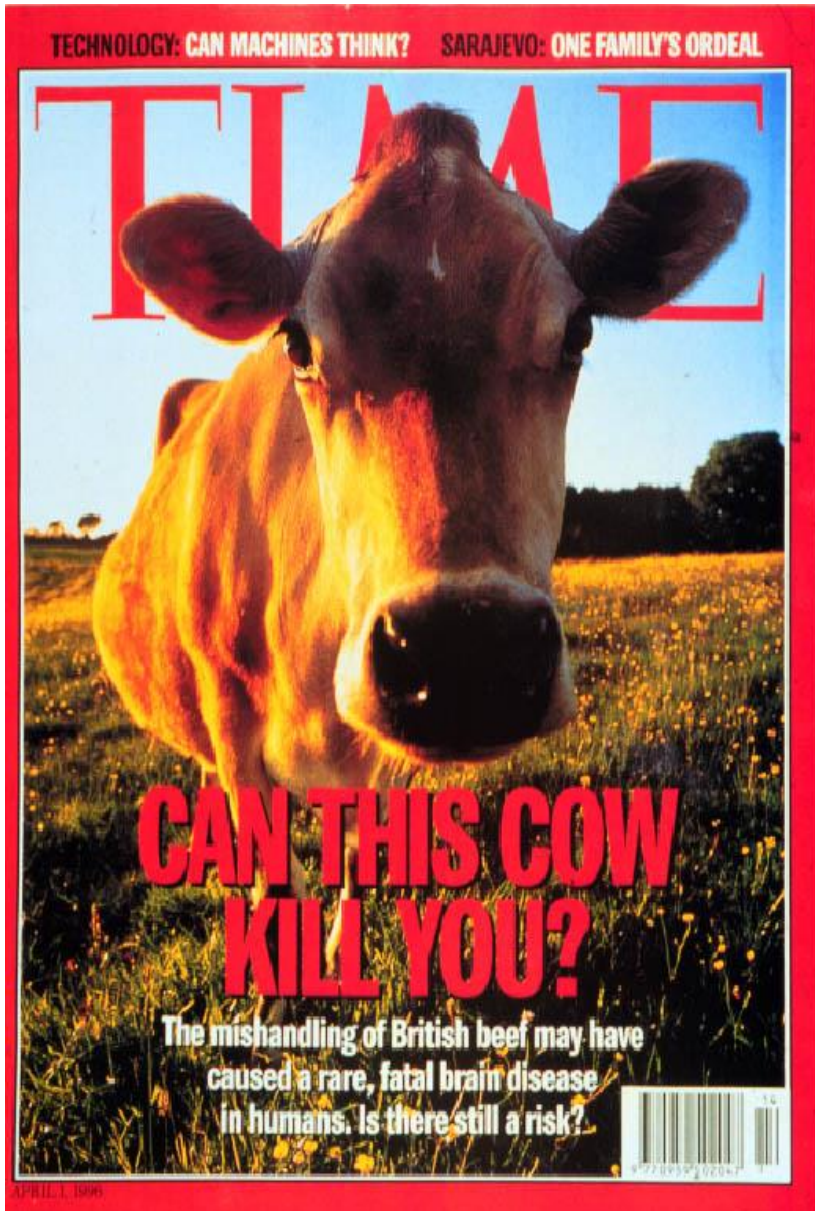


HORRIFIC MOMENT BEAR MAULING MAN

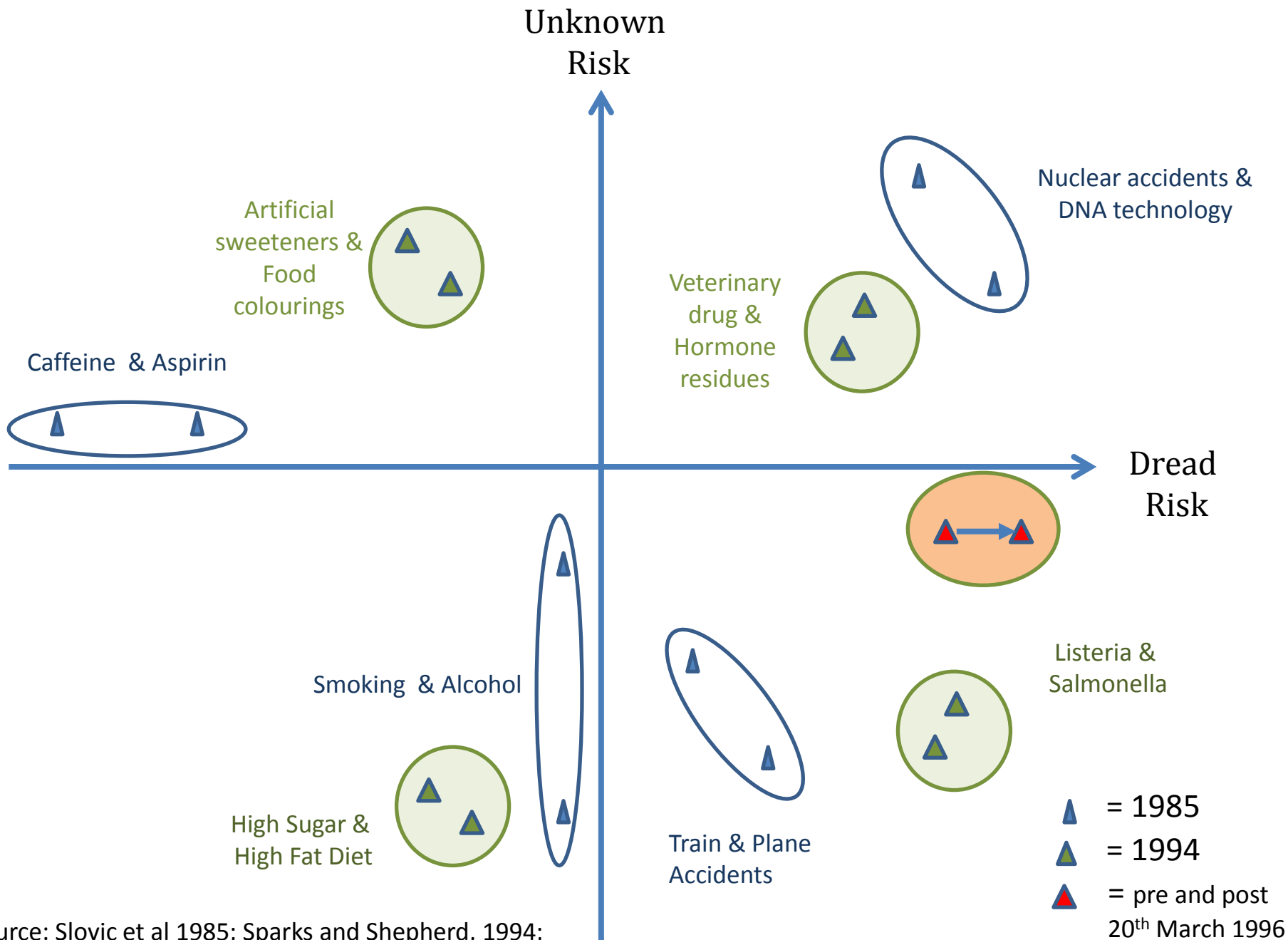


“We do warn people now that most of the egg production of this country, sadly, is now infected with salmonella”
Edwina Currie, December 1988





“There is no risk to public health from British beef”



Source: Slovic et al 1985; Sparks and Shepherd, 1994; Fife-Schaw & Rowe, 2000

Risk and Social Representations Theory

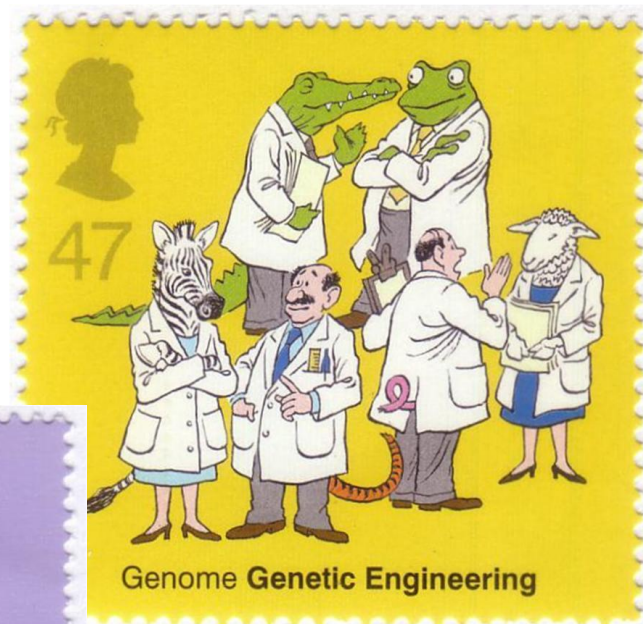
- Unfamiliarity
- Anxiety
- Uncertainty

Mechanisms of anchoring and objectification render unfamiliar risks as familiar and transform and locate them into common sense systems of meaning.

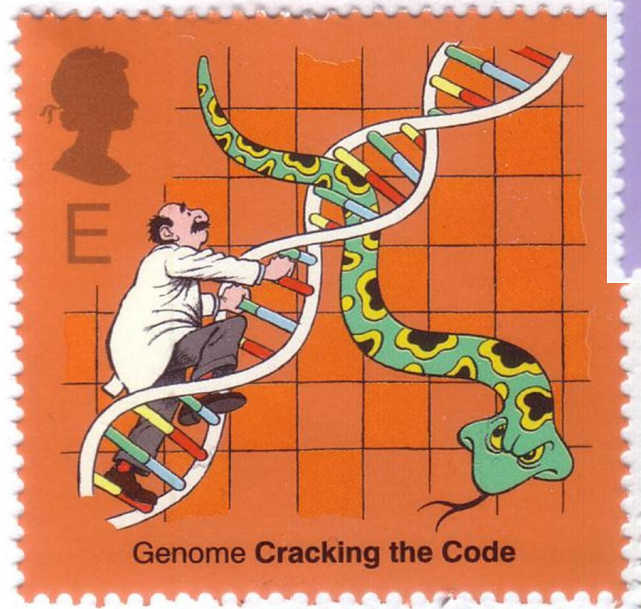
‘Sociocultural, historical and group-specific forces become sedimented in inner experiences, .. the ‘we’ becomes contained in the responses of the ‘I’. (Joffe, 2003)



Genome **Comparative Genetics**



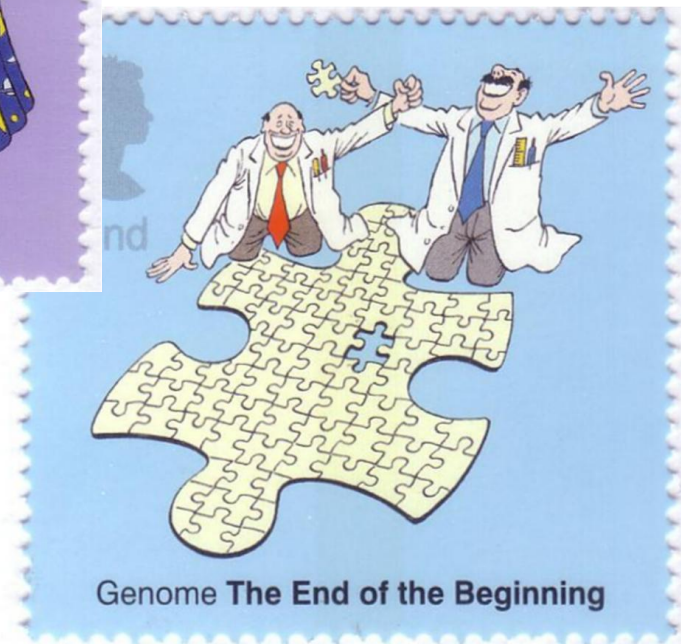
Genome **Genetic Engineering**



Genome **Cracking the Code**



Genome **Medical Futures**



Genome **The End of the Beginning**

Threat to identity arises when the *processes* of identity (assimilation – accommodation and evaluation) cannot comply with the *principles* of identity.

The principles were originally conceptualised as self-esteem, distinctiveness, self-efficacy and continuity* later extended to belonging and meaning** and psychological coherence***

Coping with threat to identity can shape social representations of risk

Social representations of risk can shape the way in which people cope with threat to identity

* [Breakwell, 1986](#); [Breakwell, 1992](#); ** [Vignoles, Chryssochoou, & Breakwell, 2002](#); *** [Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010](#)

Identity processes can shape representations of risk

- Risk communication is about exposure, acceptance and use of particular social representations
- Behaviour change or maintenance required in line with representations of risk
- Identity processes affect exposure to and acceptance and use of social representations*
.... and thus to risk communication
- Can risk communicators take this into account? How?

Social representations of risk can affect identity development

- Social representations of risk – and the way they are instantiated in risk communication - confer value and significance on identities or elements of identity
- Representations vary in their ability to ‘edit’ identity development
- There are generally multiple representations of particular risks
- People are active in making sense of social representations of risk and in seeking to ensure the principled operation of identity processes.

Managing a nut allergy

Study conducted for the Food Standards Agency

How do nut allergic individuals make choices about what food to eat or buy?

32 participants aged 16+ with a clinically diagnosed nut allergy

No other food allergies

Triangulation of 3 methods

- Accompanied shop
- Interviews
- Product Choice Reasoning Task

SEVERE: CYANOSIS OR
COLLAPSE/FAINT OR
BREATHING DIFFICULTIES
(WITH WHEEZE/THROAT
TIGHTENING)



18

MODERATE: NONE OF THE
ABOVE **PLUS** WHEEZE OR
FACE SWELLING OR TIGHT
THROAT



12

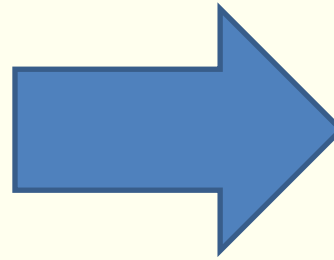
MILD: NONE OF THE ABOVE
PLUS VOMITING,
ABDOMINAL PAIN **AND/OR**
RASH



2

Clinically diagnosed allergies associated with clear largely consensual 'hazard template':

- Cause
- Consequences,
- No cure
- Mild reactions in past no cause for future confidence
- Most severe reactions occur outside the home
- AVOID THE ALLERGEN



Ask about food content
Check food labels
Carry autoinjector



Identity requirements interpolate between the different parts of the 'official' social representation of allergy

Clinically diagnosed allergies associated with clear largely consensual 'hazard template':

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Ask about food content
Check labels
Carry autoinjector

EATING OUT IN RESTAURANTS

Some NAIs did not want to be publicly identified as having an allergy

Recommended actions likely to lead to attribution of unwanted distinctiveness:

Asking about food content when eating out would render allergy publicly visible

Clinically diagnosed allergies associated with clear largely consensual 'hazard template':

- Cause
- Consequences,
- No cure
- Mild reactions in past no cause for confidence
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- AVOID THE ALLERGEN

Ask about food content
Check labels
Carry autoinjector

EATING OUT IN RESTAURANTS

Some NAIs were highly sensitised to alternative (imagined?) representations of their allergy

Recommended actions likely to lead to attribution of unwanted distinctiveness and threat to self esteem:
Food intolerant /fussy eater

Clinically diagnosed allergies associated with clear largely consensual 'hazard template':

- Cause
- Consequences,
- No cure
- Mild reactions in past no cause for confidence
- Most severe reactions occur outside the home
- AVOID THE ALLERGEN

Ask about food content
Check labels
Carry autoinjector

EATING OUT AT
HOUSE OF
ACQUAINTANCES
& FRIENDS

Some NAIs would rather risk an allergic reaction than breach norms of social interaction

Asking about the content of food; questioning the food preparation process:
Exercise of efficacy may threaten self esteem and/or continuity

So we have argued that...

The ways in which people saw and coped with threat to identity helps to explain the uptake of social representations of allergy

Use of the 'required behavioural actions' aspect of the representation was variable

Identity considerations - unwanted distinctiveness and threats to self-esteem - seemed to lie at the root of variations in precautionary action

What are the implications of this for risk communication?

Seeking to strengthen the enactment of a largely unwanted identity

- Increase sense of belonging to a community that require clear and confident response to queries about presence of allergens
- No clear encouragement to focus on increasing efficacy

A more differentiated social representation of 'reactions to food' may also help

- Distinguishing allergy from intolerance

Focus on training and equipping food outlets to have practices that enable speedy accurate and confident responses to queries about the presence of allergens

Thank you for listening
Any questions?



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